

Country Report on Holocaust Education in Task Force Member Countries

NORWAY

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The Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Norway (The Holocaust Center), Oslo, is responsible for the following report on Holocaust education in Norway.

Summary

In the last 30 years, Holocaust awareness in Norway has increased in both the educational sector and society in general. The Holocaust has been given greater prominence in the educational system and in textbooks. It has also become more and more common for schools to take part in study trips to former extermination and concentration camps in Germany and Poland, such as Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Auschwitz.

Work on Holocaust research, educational programmes and teacher training is intensifying. The Holocaust Center, which was established in 2001, is an important national institution in the field of Holocaust research, documentation, information and education.

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for implementing national educational policy. A common standard is ensured through legislation and nationwide curricula.

As part of an educational reform, the syllabi for all school subjects are now being revised. Implementation is scheduled for 2006–7. The new syllabuses are less specific than their predecessors, and more freedom will be given to textbook writers, head-teachers and teachers.

This means that there will be a greater need for educational material about the Holocaust. In this regard, the ITF is an important forum for exchange of information, documentation and views on educational policy.

Full report following the question guideline:

1. What official directives from government ministries and/or local authorities regarding the teaching of the Holocaust exist in your country?

The Ministry of Education and Research is Norway's highest public administrative agency for educational matters and is responsible for implementing national educational policy. A common standard is ensured through legislation and nationwide curricula.

In June 2004, the Storting (Norwegian parliament) approved a white paper concerning a reform of primary and secondary education in Norway. New syllabi will be introduced from 2006–7. These are less specific than their predecessors. Teaching about the Holocaust—or the Second World War, for that matter—is not mentioned specifically.

The National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination (2002–2006) states that all schools shall commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January each year. In schools, Holocaust Memorial Day was introduced for the first time in 2003 as a follow-up to a decision taken by the European Education Ministers' meeting on 18 October 2002 at the Council of Europe to set up a 'Day of remembrance of the Holocaust and for the prevention of crimes against humanity' in the 48 states that have signed the European Cultural Convention.

The educational authorities are aware that the new curricula are so general that they create a possibility for teachers to exclude the topic of the Holocaust. To meet this challenge they have signalled an increase in focus on Holocaust Memorial Day and the general battle against racism.

2. If the Holocaust is not a mandatory subject, what percentage of schools chooses to teach about the Holocaust?

The Holocaust is not a mandatory subject in Norwegian schools with the new curriculum, but both tradition and new awareness emphasize the importance of teaching about the Second World War, Nazi persecution and the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is included in all present textbooks. The number of schools making study-trips to concentration and extermination camps in Germany and Poland are increasing.

3. How is the Holocaust defined?

In Norwegian schools, the Holocaust is defined as the extermination of the Jews by the Nazi regime during the Second World War.

4. Is the Holocaust taught as a subject in its own right, or as part of a broader topic? Explain the reasoning behind this decision.

The Holocaust is taught as part of several other school subjects and not as a subject in its own right. Norwegian schools are required to use a multidisciplinary approach, and about 20 per cent of teaching time is spent on group projects.

The Holocaust is likely to be included in teaching about the Second World War in the history syllabus (9th grade and 12th grade). The Holocaust may also be included in the social sciences syllabus in connection with teaching about human rights and in

the syllabus for Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Education as part of the teaching on the dangers of prejudice and racism.

In addition, schools focus specifically on the Holocaust on Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January each year. On that date, the Minister of Education awards a special annual prize to a school that has distinguished itself in working against racism and discrimination. See below for more details on the Benjamin prize.

5. At what age(s) do young people learn about the Holocaust in schools? Do students encounter the Holocaust in schools more than once? Please give details.

The syllabus for Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Education deals with the historical situation of the Jews in Norway. This will include teaching about the deportation and extermination of Norwegian Jews 1942–45 at grades 9 or 10. Pupils learn about Judaism and the Jewish people as early as 6th grade. Anti-Semitism is treated at grades 6 and 9.

Persecution under the Nazi regime and the Second World War can be seen as part of the history and social sciences syllabus for pupils in the 9th and 10th grade.

Norwegian schools encourage a multidisciplinary approach, so it is likely that students encounter the Holocaust several times.

6. How many hours are allocated to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in schools?

This varies from three hours to three weeks.

The latter applies to schools and classes that organise trips to extermination and concentration camps in Germany and Poland. Almost 10 per cent of all students in the 9th grade participate in these trips.

7. In what areas of study (history, literature, sociology, theology) is the Holocaust taught? In each case, briefly outline the rationale for teaching the Holocaust in this particular subject area.

In history, the Holocaust is taught as an important part of the history of the Second World War.

In Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Education, the Holocaust is focused on together with moral aspects and the fight against racism and prejudice. The Holocaust is also referred to in the teaching about Judaism and Jews in Norway.

In social sciences, the Holocaust is taught together with human rights and democratic education as part of the preparation for democratic citizenship.

8. (a) What historical, pedagogical and didactic training is provided to teachers of the Holocaust at either the university level or the professional development level in your country?

(b) How many teacher-training sessions are held each year, and how many teachers are involved?

(c) What funding is available for training in the teaching of the Holocaust in your country?

There are several teacher-training courses available:

—Vestfold University College provides a course for teachers, students and others involved in school-trips to Auschwitz. The course is part-time, follows the calendar year and focuses on the didactics of the Holocaust including analysis and developments in human rights.

—The Holocaust Center offers several teacher-training courses every year, one together with the Norwegian Red Cross and the ‘White Buses to Auschwitz’, dealing with potential resistance and the universal lessons derived from the Holocaust (two-day course).

—From 2006, a Scandinavian Teacher-Training course will be held at Yad Vashem in Israel (eight days).

The Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education has provided funding for these courses, except for the Yad Vashem course in which Yad Vashem is the main financial source.

9. Has your country instituted a national Holocaust memorial day? If so, in which ways is this day marked and commemorated? What difficulties have you encountered in establishing this day of remembrance in the national consciousness?

Holocaust Memorial Day is commemorated on 27 January in Norway. The National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination states that Holocaust Memorial Day will be commemorated in schools each year. In addition, one school is awarded a special prize on that day. This prize is called the Benjamin Prize, after a 15-year old Norwegian boy who was the victim of a racially motivated murder. Benjamin Hermansen was killed by young neo-Nazis. On Holocaust Memorial Day the Holocaust Center has a memorial ceremony in Oslo at the site from which the Norwegian Jews were deported. Members of the government attend both these events.

The Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education invites all schools to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day and provides educational resources on its Web site. Schools commemorate 27 January in a variety of different ways. Some have local torchlight processions, while others invite witnesses or survivors to tell their stories. Many schools also do creative work, such as writing poems and

drawing. The Holocaust Center is planning an annual theme and preparing to provide further educational material each year.

10. Has your country established a national Holocaust memorial and/or museum? What numbers of students visit this memorial/museum each year?

The city of Trondheim has its own Jewish Museum, which commemorates the victims of the Holocaust. The city of Oslo has a Holocaust Memorial located at the pier from which the Jews were deported in 1942–43. There is also a centre in Kristiansand called Arkivet (The Archive) that houses an exhibition about Nazi persecution, and Levanger has the Falstad Memorial and Human Rights Centre (Falstadsenteret).

In 2001, Norway established its own Holocaust center, the Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Norway, as a foundation under the University of Oslo. The center is partly financed from the compensation paid by the Norwegian state for the confiscation of Jewish property during the Second World War. The Holocaust center is involved in research, education and information activities, and exhibitions and conferences. Moreover, it aims to serve as a meeting-place for people working against religious, racist and ethnically motivated repression and discrimination. In 2005, the center moved to Villa Grande, the Norwegian Nazi collaborator Vidkun Quisling's residence during the Second World War. In August 2006, a permanent Holocaust exhibition will open at Villa Grande.

11. Please estimate the percentage of students in your country who visit authentic sites, and list three primary sources of funding available in your country for visits to authentic sites.

We estimate that about 25 per cent of the pupils in 9th grade visit authentic sites, either in Norway or Poland and Germany.

The museums and visitor centres in Norway are free of charge.

The Ministry of Defence grants a fixed sum for each school class that travels to concentration camps in Poland and Germany. The Norwegian Red Cross sponsors travel costs for students from schools in the north of Norway, enabling them to travel to Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen at the same cost as those in the south. Students and their families pay the rest themselves.

12. What are the three major textbooks used in teaching the Holocaust in your country? How many pages do your school textbooks allocate to the Holocaust, and on which aspects do they focus?

History textbooks have devoted an increasing amount of space to Jewish history over the past 30 years. The factual information is more detailed than before and the use of examples and individual stories has improved.

New textbooks are in the process of being made. The largest publishers in Norway all produce textbooks, and schools are free to choose whichever they prefer for their students.

13. What strategies of differentiation are typically used to make the study of the Holocaust accessible to students of different ages and with different learning needs?

The curriculum offers schools and teachers a wide degree of flexibility in selecting educational material and which teaching methods to use. The tools generally used in Norway to differentiate between different age-groups are films, literature, and poetry. The use of individual stories are also seen to be effective.

The Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education, the Holocaust Center, The White Busses to Auschwitz, Falstadsenteret, the Norwegian Red Cross, etc., all provide material on their Web sites (free of charge) and/or have different publications available.

14. How far and in what ways is your country's own national history integrated into the teaching of the Holocaust?

The teaching of Norwegian Second World War history is giving increasing emphasis to aspects of the Holocaust in Norway.

More research is currently being done on the Holocaust, which will benefit the school system at a later stage.

15. What are the three major obstacles to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in your country?

There has been no survey done to investigate the issue of obstacles. The obstacles mentioned here are mere impressions gained from informal discussions with teachers.

(a) Competing international issues: Terrorism, genocidal tendencies, such as in Darfur, and natural disasters sometimes compete with the Holocaust for teaching time. Some teachers suffer from a certain Second World War 'fatigue'.

(b) Different views on the situation in the Middle East: The current political situation in the Middle East has made it more challenging, but also more important, for teachers to convey the distinction between current events and history.

(c) The time gap: The generation that experienced the Second World War and the Holocaust is disappearing. There are very few survivors of the Holocaust left; in Norway there are now only two.